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A Fine Example of English Pewter



Plate I.

From the Collection of a Connoisseur

The Charm of Old Pewter

Written by
EVELYN MARIE STUART

Collection of
MRS. CLARA E. BUXBAUM

SINGULARLY unromantic indeed must be the soul of one who does not thrill with the love of old things and cherish a desire, perhaps vague and undefined, for the pastime of collecting. Many are the saving virtues of such a fad or hobby, offering, as it does, a consuming interest that lacks the disturbing element of the personal, something to take one out of one's self and even comfortably vary association with one's kind.

An avenue for adventure, a realm of romance awaits the collector in any line, especially the collector of antiques. Almost any seeker after the rare and curious can regale a listener with delightful and amusing anecdotes of the chase, vivid scenes along the trail that leads through auction rooms, old-fashioned homesteads, or farmhouse garrets in remote localities, or with bits of family or national history associated with some treasured article of domestic or personal use. Here the fascination of the past, the mysterious pleasure of feeling a



Plate II—NIGHTLAMP



Plate III—ORNATE PLACQUE IN FRENCH PEWTER

kinship with those of other days, the satisfaction of possession and the joy in things beautiful are united with the excitement of discovery and of bargaining.

Small wonder that the collector is exempt from nervous prostration, suicide or insanity, for he has discovered a permanent and ever fresh interest in life which does not depend in any great measure on the development of the plot of his own individual drama, and inasmuch as no collection is ever complete, no collector can ever become satiated. Collecting, in fact, might be termed the philosophy of material possession, inasmuch as it seeks objects of virtue or value not for their importance as related to the needs of their possessor, but for their importance in themselves as examples of certain principles in design and construction. This broadens the scope of ownership indefinitely, for as one might tire of society and find a keen interest in sociology, so the man or woman who would quickly exhaust an interest in canes or teapots for personal use finds an inexhaustible



Plate IV—CEREMONIAL PASSOVER PLATE

attraction in a collection of these articles, valued abstractly and impersonally for themselves alone.

The wider the variety afforded by the object or type of objects collected the more varied is the interest, quite naturally, so that among the various things selected for the exercise of this activity pewter has not been as popular as china, pottery, glass, or things of even greater value. To the student, however, whose taste along these lines is once awakened there is much of charm and of beauty in the dull silvery surfaces and quaint shapes of utensils in this honest old fabric.



Plate V—"PRINCE CHARLIE" PLATE OF SCOTTISH PEWTER

Every one is sufficiently familiar with the term "pewter" to possess a general idea of the nature of this metal, and indeed, so wide are the varieties in formulæ for the compounding of this material that a general idea is about all the facts allow. Thus speaking, pewter might be defined as any alloy of metals in which tin predominates. Lead or copper, copper and antimony, lead, copper and zinc, or antimony, copper and bismuth may all be combined with tin in the making of pewter. At different periods and places various laws existed laying down with old fashioned strictness the formulæ for fine pewter, better pewter and plate pewter, and defining the quality to be employed in articles designed for different purposes.

Nothing was more closely associated than was pewter with the domestic life of the past, and yet not nearly as many examples of the old ware as one might expect are to be found today intact and in their original form. We all know that for centuries the oaken dressers and heavy cupboards of castle and cottage alike abounded in mugs, trenchers and porringers of this soft, easily molded metal, while the public houses found it indispensable in kitchen, dining-room and bar. This, together with the fact that articles of pewter are fairly durable and not easily broken like glass or china, nor so precious as to tempt remelting, like gold and silver, for the metal alone, might lead us to expect a much greater quantity of old pewter than is really available. However, even this lowly metal was in times of great stress molded into bullets to repel an enemy or into small coins to help lift the burden of national debt, while changing fashions prompted the remodeling of many another store of old pieces.

Religious as well as political revolutions likewise left their influence upon pewter, for the church plate changed in form and

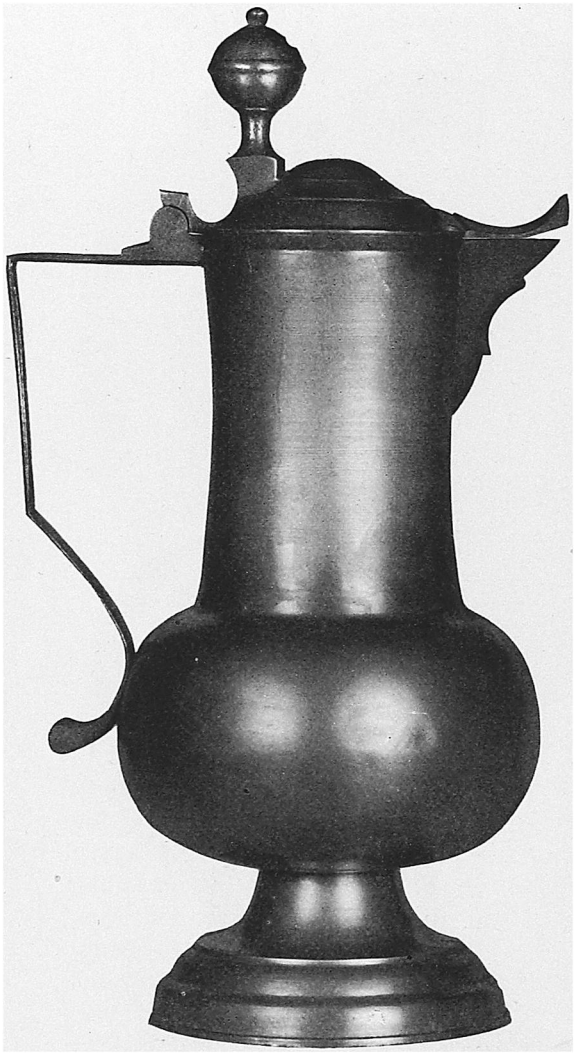


Plate VI—FINE OLD FLAGON OF PLAIN PEWTER

variety as the various waves of the reformation swept over Europe and the British Isles, vessels that had answered ecclesiastical purposes in the service of Catholicism being deemed unsuitable for the Episcopalian communion, and Church of England plate in turn not proving to the taste of Puritans and Presbyterians. This is one of the reason why ecclesiastical pieces are rare and why a good old communion service or benitere is accounted such a treasure by collectors.

Family plate, too, suffered through the vicissitudes of fashion, for it was remodeled and recast often by gypsies or traveling tinkers, though the laws of the pewterers' guilds or companies distinctly forbade such unlicensed encroachments upon the rights of the craft. Thus many bits of old table ware are difficult to identify or date, by reason of the lack of all guild or individual markings. Pewter turned out strictly according to law and order was stamped with the mark of the company in the town of its fabrication, and further with the individual touch of the maker.

As a record of these guilds has been preserved in the most important towns and cities of Europe and the British Isles, and likewise a plate with their marks and a list of their members each with his mark, it is often possible to tell exactly when and where a certain pewter vessel was fabricated. Absence of such marks, however, does not by any means argue against the antiquity of the piece, for reasons stated previously.

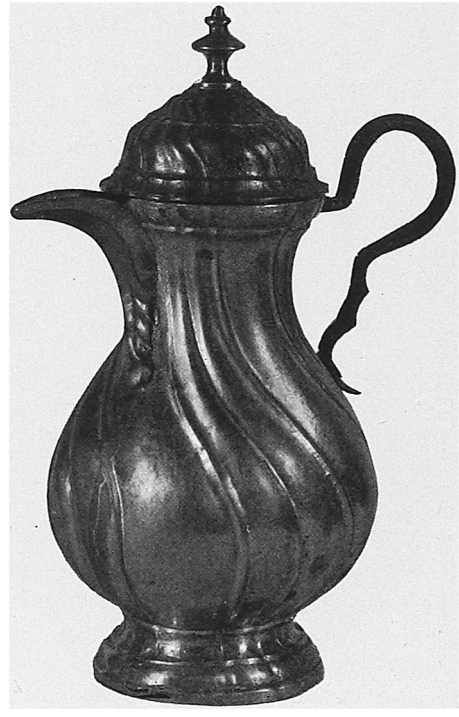


Plate VII—INDIVIDUAL FRENCH COFFEE POT

One of the distinguishing characteristics of much old pewter is a spotted or mottled surface effected by time, as a result of the component materials settling in different combinations at various points during cooling, for the mechanical combination of materials often did not remain uniform throughout the piece. A variegated surface would thus naturally result, while time and oxidation would tend to intensify this effect.

The method of manufacturing pewter articles varied with the types or forms of the productions themselves. Large chargers and other flat dishes were beaten out with the hammer from a rolled sheet of the metal, "a process," says an authority, which consolidated the metal and gave the necessary rigidity while at the same time producing the desirable smoothness of surface." Small plates, dishes and porringers were cast in one piece, while larger ones with curved sides, molded rims, handles, flutings, lids, threadings and fancy feet, were cast in sections, as was hollow ware generally, and after being soldered together finished by burnishing on a lathe. Pewter spoons and tableware are possibly the most common of existing examples of the sturdy old craft, ecclesiastical pieces and guild cups are generally considered as rare, while lamps are perhaps the rarest of all. In fact, a writer reviewing an exhibition of old pewter in Boston voiced a doubt as to the existence of any pewter lamps. There are, however, several well authenticated specimens, one of which we have here illustrated.

A fine example of ecclesiastical tankards we are also fortunate in being able to present in the one portrayed in Plate IX. This is a massive vessel ornamented with four shields boldly embossed with symbolical motifs, a pontifical crown surmounting the three upon the body. A shield upon the cover displays the Agnus Dei, while the heads and wings of cherubs form the feet. These emblems, unmistakably Cath-



Plate VIII—TREE TRIMMERS' CUP



Plate IX—ANTIQUE ECCLESIASTICAL TANKARD

olic, point to antiquity, as vessels of more costly metals have long since found general favor with the church. This is a massive piece about nineteen inches high, bearing the mark of Blok Zin only. Like the other tankards and flagons here shown, it has escaped the melting pot and the changes of fashion.

Among pewter pieces, none are more prized than the solid and handsome old German guild cups, fascinating alike in form and history. It requires no stretch of imagination to picture the sturdy craftsman enjoying the brew of the Fatherland, as it foamed in these old flagons. We have chosen for illustration characteristic examples of these massive old drinking cups, among which the one surmounted with a sculptured figure, Plate VIII, is perhaps most interesting. The noble aspect of the figure with banner and shield suggests to the uninitiated that it is the image of some great warrior. A closer inspection of the shield, however, reveals a device of two crossed pruning knives with the motto, "Vivat der Gerber," proclaiming our supposed hero a trimmer of hedges and trees. On his banner is emblazoned a legend altogether lofty and inspiring, "Hochliebe der edel handwerk," "Hail the noble handcraft," surely a more human and civilized motto than is usual on the banner of knight or prince, a device which, we fancy, would have been altogether approved by Professor Teufelsdroch.

In the bottom of the flagon a medallion, perhaps an old coin, is set, displaying a crowned head in profile with the date of 1628. On the handle is the mark A. M. above double towers, while below it an eagle and shield, the coat of arms of Nuremburg, declares the place of its fabrication. The cup stands eighteen inches high and the date below the maker's mark is 1673, which would indicate that the piece was produced not too long after the death of Gaspar Enderlein, that famous Swiss who brought the craft of the pewterer to such a high degree of perfection, of Nuremburg, to have been influenced by his style and his theories.

Less elegant in style but of equally pro-

nounced character is the quaint old tankard, Plate XVI, adorned with the ugly but honest faces of the prominent men of a German town, sculptored in relief upon its surface. Though this mug of mugs could scarcely be accounted a thing of beauty, it is nevertheless a joy forever on account of the gentle amusement it inspires. Herr Pastor, Herr Doctor, Herr Burgomaster, Herr Notor (the Notary), Herr Cantor (the Singing or Choir Master), Herr Amtman (a commander, possibly the town marshal) shine out from its surface sincerely if sourly, in serious appreciation of their own dignity. The faces have all the characteristics of true portraits rather well executed, and the legend upon the shield surmounting the cover indicates that the tankard was presented to the Buyers' Bureau by the distinguished gentlemen who have so graciously loaned us their countenances. Upon this shield is the date of 1673, but the handle shows a date of 1709 above the maker's touch, leaving one in doubt as to whether these gentlemen themselves ordered the flagon or whether it was prepared later as a memorial to the virtues of a past regime. In the bottom of the flagon on the inside is Nuremberg rose, a not unusual marking upon old German pieces, as this town was one of the chief centers of activity for some time, owing, perhaps to the influence of Gaspar Enderlein. The coat of arms of Nuremburg also appears on the handle above the stamp "Blok zin," and a further mark, possibly the maker's touch, of a hart's horn.

The flagon sacred to hunters (Plate XII), to judge from the sculptored figure in the niche with crossbow in hand, and the bugle about the stag's head below, also has the Nuremburg rose stamped on the inside of the bottom. The mark on the handle gives a date of 1673, with the eagle and shield of the old city so famous for its pewterers and an individual stamp showing a key and anchor crossed upon a shield. The workmanship throughout has



Plate X—BALL-FOOTED FLAGON WITH ENGRAVED INSCRIPTIONS

a suggestion of French grace and delicacy, although the fidelity with which the little figure is modeled is characteristically German. French pewter work exercised its influence upon the German craftsman,



Plate XI—COFFEE POT WITH MEDALLION DECORATION

even the work of Enderlein giving evidence of this fact.

Of the same date is the fine old flagon, Plate VI, set upon a standard and guiltless of ornamentation. No better examples than this of the artistic possibilities of the metal unadorned could have been chosen. On the handle is the mark of a shield with a crossed key and anchor, and beyond is the horn of a deer or the branch of a tree impressed in the soft metal. The anchor and key mark appears again on the handle of the ball-footed flagon, Plate X, surmounted by a rampant lion. This piece is dated 1680, and we may infer that it was from the same shop as the one preceding or from one of the shops of the same company of pewterers. It is chased and engraved with the figure of a knightly person above whose head is a streamer of ribbon with the words, "Gott, Erhalte Uns." In the bottom of the flagon a coin has been sunk, a common practice and one which we have before observed. On one side of the cup, under the word "Zunstmeister," appear five names, and on the other side, under the word "Meister," appears seven names. This drinking horn



Plate XII—A GERMAN DESIGN SHOWING FRENCH INFLUENCE



Plate XIII—A WEDDING CUP IN ENGRAVED PEWTER

was very possibly a birthday gift to some workman or master workman from the fellows of his craft.

Surpassingly Germanic is the odd castellated flagon, Plate XIV, its lid surmounted by a pointed watch tower. We are not surprised to find the rose of Nuremburg at the bottom, like truth in a well. Some might find this piece more quaint and ingenious than artistic, but it is none the less intensely interesting, perhaps because so typically Teutonic. This piece also shows the maker's mark of two towers, a hart's horn and the "Blok zin" stamp.

Two unusually good simple pieces are the flat bottomed flagons, Plates XIII and XV. The outlines are strong and plain, and a relief of surface embellishment thus becomes almost necessary. In the first, a gift cup, this contrast is afforded by engravings and chasings with the names of the donors and the recipient. He may have been a wheelwright or smithy, as one



Plate XIV—OLD WATCH TOWER FLAGON



Plate XV—STRENGTH AND DIGNITY OF SIMPLE LINES

would judge from the horseshoe, wheel, hatchet, sledges and kindred instruments which embellish the flagon significantly. This was very evidently a wedding gift, as the inscription would indicate. The handle is marked with the eagle and shield and the date of 1673.

In the second piece under consideration a conventionalized border of embossing about the body produces the desired ornate effect, while the shield surmounting the lid, like the ball top at the handle of the preceding flagon, gives added interest and agreeably relieves the severity of form.

Related in style of lid, handle and standard to the flagon, Plate VI, is the small drinking vessel or coffee pot, Plate XI, though here the rounded body has more the outlines of a flask. This piece bears the date of 1673 and is apparently of German manufacture, bearing a strong resemblance to the guild flagons in its various contours. It, too, shows the hart's-horn mark, which one might infer to be the stamp of some guild or company by reason of the fact that the other mark shows a woman's figure in a shield, instead of the before mentioned anchor and key. The portrait of Catherina Riva is well executed and suggests somewhat a coin or a cameo.

In Plate VII we have a nice example of French grace and daintiness in a tiny individual coffee pot with cover hinged at the side and handle wound in reed or rattan. The shape of this piece is exquisitely delicate and pleasing, the waiving lines of embossing suggesting the twisting of the piece at a single stroke from a mass of soft metal. It has something the appearance that we see in a soft clay vessel moving and turning in waves under the potter's wet fingers.

Of a grace equally Gallic is the platter or tray, Plate III, heavily embossed with roccoco motifs and garlands and dolphins and finished with heavy threading along its scalloped edge. These two pieces recall the exquisite art of the French pewterers, Briot and his fellows, who skillfully imitated silver designs in the baser metals. Back of this is a story of the extravagance and resulting poverty of the nobles during the reign of Louis XV, when court excesses so exhausted the income of many a princely family that a sale of plate became imperative and a subsequent substitution of pewter, wrought as brilliantly as possible in imitation of the vanished plate. This genteel poverty gave a great impetus and importance to the pewterers' craft, and resulted in some improvement of design.

Many, however, prefer the simple, straightforward forms characteristic of pewter alone, and look upon the imitation of silver patterns as a debasement of the art.

An interesting English offering is the Liverpool plate adorned with the coat of arms of the city in embossing and with its edge embellished with chasing and threading. The outer border of this plate is quite similar, though not identical with the French piece previously mentioned.

Eloquet of Scottish romance is the battered old pewter placque, Plate V, displaying a company of musicians. Here the Highland piper with the fiddler and other companions are waiting on the dock or quay to welcome Bonnie Prince Charlie on his return from over the seas. The silvery gray of the dented pewter suggests the fog and mists of the sea appropriately, for one feels that only a gray day could have befitted so ill-fated a home coming.

The Passover plate with a Hebrew prayer engraved upon its rim, Plate IV, likewise snatches a scene from the drama of life. Here is an Orthodox Jewish family gathered to celebrate the Feast of the Passover, while at the door stands a stranger, typifying the wandering angel Elijah. Mrs. Philip Cowen, in her arrangement of the Seder service, thus explains the picture:

"An extra cup of wine is usually set upon the table. This is called 'the cup of Elijah.' Elijah in Jewish legend is of the type of the Wandering Angel, and he may, unbidden, enter the house on Passover at the opening of the door after the saying of grace. More properly it may be called a company cup. The service begins with an invitation to him who is hungry to enter and to celebrate the Passover, so that the 'cup of Elijah' is emblematic of this hospitality.

"It has been suggested that in the days when Jews were compelled to deny their faith and observe their religion secretly, underground or in the woods, this cup, as well as the vacant chair that in some countries of Europe it was customary to place at the table, were expressive of the hope that some pious brother, outwardly of alien faith, would enter during the evening and accept the invitation involved in the opening paragraph of this service. In fact, it is known that this was often done, the visitor coming in late usually, because of the need of entering the house of one known to be Jew with much circumspection and by a roundabout road, in order to avoid suspicion and discovery."

Upon this dish, so the Jewish custom dictated, there were to be placed three Matzoth, each covered separately with a napkin. The prayer on the rim is that which is repeated at the beginning of the feast as the dish is lifted up, and reads, "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt: let all who are hungry enter and eat thereof."

Most noteworthy of all, we find the little



Plate XVI—AN ODD EXAMPLE OF PEWTER PORTRAITURE

housewife's lamp, Plate II, with glass bulb for oil and homespun wick. This was not only a light but a timekeeper as well, for, marked upon the metal band which runs around the glass globe from top to base are figures for the hours. As the oil diminished it thus marked the hour, the figures ranging from nine in the evening, when the lamp was lighted, to seven the next morning, when it was extinguished. There is a legend that the good man of the house was supposed to extinguish the lamp upon his return from an evening out, thereby indicating to the housewife the exact time of his homecoming. This, however, seems hardly possible, and if such a custom ever existed, no doubt the good man evaded it by forgetting to extinguish the lamp and permitting it to burn all night. It is more likely that this device answered the purpose of a night lamp and a clock. Attached to the handle by a chain is a small metal pin for picking the wick as it burned and charred.

With the exception of the French and English pieces and the night lamp, all of these interesting specimens of pewter are from a collection which for years remained securely guarded in an old castle in Germany. Through inheritance they came into possession of a Parisian of German stock on the maternal side, by whom they were brought to this country. For sixty-odd years he treasured them, and passed them on to his descendants, who parted with them only through necessity. They have been in the United States perhaps for upwards of fifty years, and form the basis of one of the best known of private collections.

The pieces illustrated are but a few articles selected from an extensive and remarkable assemblage of antiques, embracing besides much fine old china, furniture, silver and glass, on which a volume could be written.

AMONG THE GALLERIES

WITH the opening of a ground floor display room the galleries of Mr. W. Scott Thurber in the Fine Arts building add another note of interest to Michigan avenue, that thoroughfare of things beautiful in Chicago. This new display room is in direct communication by private elevator with the quaint and unusually effective suite on the fifth floor which has, for some time past, been regarded as one of the beauty spots of the city.

This main floor gallery is unique in color scheme and general arrangement, abounding in delicate tones and soft light. The woodwork is finished in ivory enamel and the walls are hung with a velour of a deeper dull ivory tint showing a glint of grey in its high lights. This velour is not applied directly to the wall nor hung in pleated or folded draperies as is usual, but arranged to hang loose from the wall without fullness, weighted ends keeping it in place.

The ivory tones are relieved by traceries of gilding and colors in the carved wood panelings about the doors and elevator and by the use of hangings of a deep soft rose in the inner doorway leading from the entrance of the building.

While not a period room, the general feeling is French, elegant and graceful, yet delicate and dainty. The scheme of portfolios and picture stalls divided by screens, which was introduced with such good results in the fifth floor galleries, is carried out again here and also the idea of long tables with multiple trays for etchings and prints.

Exquisite bits of French furniture, however, take the place of specially designed oak pieces which are such an attractive feature of the rooms above, the French furniture being here more in keeping with the general spirit of the interior.

Swinging from heavy bronze chains are misty lamps of carved alabaster, seeming like suspended basins of soft light, which illuminate the room with a radiance indescribably lovely. Window hangings of ivory velour complete the scheme of one of the most delightful settings for gems of art that taste and skill have ever devised.